

EXHIBIT 29

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND

STATE OF MARYLAND; et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

C.A. No. 1:25-cv-01363-DLB

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND
COMMUNITY SERVICE, OPERATING AS
AMERICORPS; et al.,

Defendants.

DECLARATION OF VICTOR PORETTI

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, I, Victor Poretti, hereby declare as follows:

1. I am a resident of the State of New Jersey. I am over the age of 18 and have personal knowledge of all the facts stated herein, including as based on my experience and information provided to me. If called as a witness, I could and would testify competently to the matters set forth below.

2. I am currently employed by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) as Director of the Division of Water Monitoring, Standards and Pesticide Control. As Director of the Division of Water Monitoring, Standards and Pesticide Control, I directly oversee the administration and operation of the New Jersey Watershed Ambassadors Program (NJWAP), an AmeriCorps program.

3. Founded in 2000, the NJWAP is a community-oriented AmeriCorps program designed to raise awareness about water issues in New Jersey. AmeriCorps is a national service program administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to engage citizens to help address the nation's most pressing challenges. The NJWAP improves the lives,

strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement under the focus area of environmental stewardship. As the most densely populated state in the nation, New Jersey's waters are a valuable and vulnerable resource susceptible to human impact. As such their protection is augmented by the AmeriCorps Ambassadors who, for the past twenty-five years, have worked with local communities to channel awareness into action to protect clean water.

4. Through the program, Watershed Ambassadors are placed at local host sites in twenty (20) Watershed Management Areas (WMAs) throughout the state to serve their local communities. An additional three (3) Source Water Protection (SWP) Ambassadors are placed in north, central and south locations and engage in outreach and education campaigns designed to lead to the protection of drinking water supplies.

5. The program works with all sectors of society to improve the quality of New Jersey's waterways, nurturing community-based environmental activities, educating school-going children in classrooms, and empowering residents to make responsible and informed decisions regarding their watershed.

6. In the 2023–24 service year, for example, Watershed Ambassadors planned a series of 19 projects that began on March 2nd and ended on March 26 for the fourth year of “Projects in The Parks.” This initiative is in partnership with NJ State Parks, Forests, and Historic Sites as an extension of AmeriCorps Week, occurring annually in March to celebrate the impact of AmeriCorps. Projects included litter cleanups, invasive species removals, tree plantings and maintenance, a rain barrel workshop, and trail maintenance. Members recruited 377 volunteers, removed 12 tons of trash, and improved 8 miles of trails and 11 acres of public land.

7. Over the last 24 years, it is estimated that more than 460 Watershed Ambassadors have hosted 2880 partnership projects and stewardship training events including cleanups, rain

barrel workshops, and invasive species removals; trained and educated over 535,200 individuals in environmental stewardship practices, watersheds, and factors that can affect water quality; performed 7,200 stream assessments; planted 4,800 trees and shrubs; and removed and properly disposed of 744 tons of trash.

8. The NJWAP has been supported by AmeriCorps for the past two decades. Since 2000, the program has received nearly \$9 million in both formula and competitive CNCS grants and has enlisted 467 AmeriCorps members in service to the State of New Jersey.

9. On the evening of Friday, April 25, I learned from news reports that “Elon Musk’s U.S. DOGE Service ha[d] ordered AmeriCorps to terminate close to \$400 million in grants—roughly 41 percent of the national service agency’s total grant funding.”¹

10. On Monday, April 28, I learned that several AmeriCorps programs in New Jersey—including NJWAP—had been notified that their current program year funding was terminated.

11. On Wednesday, April 30, I received a notice from the New Jersey Department of State, which administers AmeriCorps formula funding for the State of New Jersey, directing NJWAP to stop all work immediately. Any expenses incurred beyond April 25, 2025 that are not considered “allowable costs” will not be reimbursed. A copy of the stop work order is attached as Exhibit A. The notice further states that AmeriCorps members may continue service activities until May 9, 2025, but after that date, the New Jersey Department of State can no longer guarantee their positions.

12. As of April 25, 2025, for the current fiscal year ending June 30, the amount expended on NJWAP’s grant was \$395,545, with a remaining balance of \$80,190.

¹ Tobi Raji, *DOGE orders major cut to AmeriCorps funding, imperiling agency’s work*, Wash. Post, Apr. 25, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/04/25/american-corps-grant-cuts-doge/>.

13. Prior to April 26, AmeriCorps supported 23 full-time service members who served in NJWAP. Those service members received:

- a. A bi-weekly living allowance;
- b. Health care benefits;
- c. Child care assistance (if eligible);
- d. Upon successful completion of their term of service, a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which could be used toward school tuition, most federally approved student loans, or future education costs for up to seven years; and
- e. Loan forbearance during term of service on qualified student loans.

14. Going forward, NJDEP may not have the resources to offer comparable benefits to full-time service members absent AmeriCorps funding. The imminent suspension of service members' benefits already has led to stop-work orders. The result may be as many as 39,100 service hours lost annually in environmental and watershed management, source water protection, and environmental education.

15. NJWAP has received AmeriCorps funding for more than 20 years and NJDEP had applied for a grant on April 21st to continue to operate the program for the coming fiscal year. Because the current grant was cancelled with no notice and minimal explanation, I have no confidence that NJDEP will be approved for funding as it routinely has been for the past two decades.

16. Without clarity as to why the current grant was terminated or when grants for next year will be awarded, NJDEP does not know how much money will need to be replaced and cannot readily identify substitute funds that might allow us to continue to operate NJWAP, even at a reduced level, in future years.

17. Along with the abrupt demobilization and revocation of awarded funds for other AmeriCorps programs in recent weeks, the sudden cancellation of this grant with no direct advanced notice is deeply discouraging and will doubtless have a negative ripple effect on potential volunteers in New Jersey and future potential service corps members.

18. The sudden cancellation further impacts NJDEP's ability to recruit future Watershed Ambassadors. In a typical year, NJDEP will select and interview candidates from a pool of AmeriCorps applicants. The NJWAP relies primarily on the AmeriCorps State and National portal My AmeriCorps to fill its 23 service positions through their online application process. The My AmeriCorps portal allows candidates to apply to advertised positions and is then used for enrollment, allowing members to track their service, manage their education award and apply for loan forbearance.

19. Without funding from AmeriCorps, and access to their established pool of qualified applicants and My AmeriCorps portal, NJDEP will have to undertake a significant administrative burden to develop a new recruitment process for selecting Watershed Ambassadors. The time needed to develop this recruitment process may delay selection of ambassadors, potentially causing issues of continuity in this critical watershed management work.

20. The support that NJWAP members provide to New Jersey's watersheds is critical and irreplaceable. The program works with all sectors of society to improve the quality of New Jersey's waterways, nurturing community-based environmental activities and empowering residents to make responsible and informed decisions regarding their watershed. NJWAP members which NJDEP refers to as watershed ambassadors are the boots on the ground focusing on increasing public knowledge and awareness of sources of drinking water, drinking water quality and water conservation. Watershed ambassadors educate students and citizens about watersheds

and encourage them to get involved in local stewardship actions such as picking up after pets, conserving water, installing rain gardens, or volunteering for a stream cleanup. NJWAP members also assess the local rivers and streams using both visual and biological assessment protocols. Through the numerous cleanup activities, the ambassadors prevent pollution from entering our waterways. The loss of the NJWAP program due to AmeriCorps' effective closure will be keenly felt.

21. NJWAP is a community institution and without AmeriCorps members to act as Watershed Ambassadors, there will be a loss of service and knowledge about New Jersey's watersheds and how to maintain clean water for New Jersey communities . NJWAP provides important education resource and services at no cost to New Jersey's public schools. Schools and teachers rely on and expect Watershed Ambassadors to continue to provide educational presentations to students and on topics of watersheds, water quality, source water, point source and nonpoint source pollutions, and water conservation The United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that nonpoint source pollution is the leading source of water quality pollution in the United States and is preventable through education.

22. In addition, the stream data collected by the watershed ambassadors is used by the NJDEP to augment department data to inform decision-making on achieving clean water. Many communities rely on members to assist with stormwater mitigation and address local goals for nonpoint pollution and flooding reduction, at no cost.

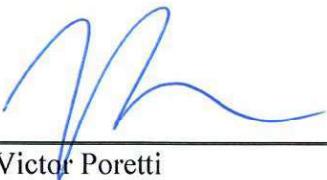
23. Examples of the significant work and assistance that NJWAP performed in 2024 include:

- a. 120 partnership projects and stewardship training events, leveraging over 2,900 volunteers in stewardship and training over 22,300 in environmental stewardship;
- b. 1047 educational presentations conducted;
- c. 113 rain barrels built;
- d. 158,200 gallons of stormwater mitigated;
- e. over 300 stream assessments conducted;
- f. 200 trees and shrubs planted;
- g. 31 tons of trash collected and removed from the environment (the equivalent of 1249 bags); and
- h. 1.5 tons of materials properly recycled (the equivalent of 55 bags).

These examples are consistent with results from past years of the program and the current cycle. This work may be significantly reduced, delayed, or cancelled if the program is abruptly terminated.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on May 5, 2025, at Trenton, New Jersey.



Victor Poretti